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Land conservation in South Carolina

Land, from the beginning of the settlement of the Colony of Carolina, has been the basis of the economic welfare of our State. In fact, prior to the first permanent settlements, it was the quest for land that caused the rival explorations of the Spanish, French, and English. Throughout the years we have relied upon the land to serve our people and to it we have looked for food, clothing, and shelter.

The landowners of South Carolina have been quick to avail themselves of every opportunity for better use of the land. As individuals and as groups they have advanced from the hit or miss type of farming practiced by the pioneers to the scientific agriculture of today. A great step forward was taken with the establishment of Clemson College about 1890. Even before then the state had supported experiments to determine better farming practices. The work of Clemson and its affiliated Extension Service and Experiment Station has been well supported by the State.

The Experiment Station, as an adjunct of Clemson College, has as the objective of its work in the various sections of the State the development of the most efficient use of the land. In this research, special attention is given to the adaptation of crops to particular soils, and to fertilizer and cultural practices, combined with the most efficient use of manpower and equipment.

The Clemson College Extension Service, jointly supported by the Federal and State governments, with a staff of workers in each county, carries the results of research to the farmers throughout the State. The great advance in

agricultural production in recent years has been due largely to the application of research methods to the farm practices of our people.

Vocational agriculture classes are taught in practically all high schools of the State and a basic feature of this teaching has been the use of land. Thus are our farmers of the future given proper training in scientific agriculture.

South Carolina has been in the forefront in the current movement for soil conservation. The Federal Government in 1933 established one of the first soil conservation demonstration projects in South Carolina on the South Tyger River in Greenville and Spartanburg Counties. *while a member of the State Senate, I sponsored in* In 1937, the General Assembly *passed* an Act known as the Soil Conservation Districts Law, *was passed and* which became effective upon approval of the Governor on April 17, 1937. South Carolina thus became one of the first states to pass such a law. It is my understanding that similar laws have now been passed by all 48 states.

The South Carolina Soil Conservation Districts Law declares that the farm lands of the State of South Carolina are among the basic assets of the State and that the preservation of these lands is necessary to protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of its people. It sets forth the policy of the legislature to provide for the conservation of the soil and soil resources of the State, and for the control and prevention of soil erosion, and thereby to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers and harbors, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of this State.

To administer the law, the act provided for establishment of an agency of the State known as the State Soil Conservation Committee, with the director of the State Agricultural Extension Service and the director of the South Carolina Experiment Station as ex-officio members. The law provides that these two

members shall invite the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States to appoint an additional member. The state conservationist of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service was appointed in response to this invitation and has continuously served as the third member of the committee.

Under provisions of the law, any 25 owners of land lying within the limits of the territory proposed to be organized into a district may petition the State Soil Conservation Committee to organize a soil conservation district. The Committee then holds hearings to determine the need for a district. If it is determined that a district is desirable, a referendum is held among the land-owners living within the proposed district.

The farmers of South Carolina were so interested in soil conservation that within a relatively short time after the Act was passed, the entire State had been organized into 21 soil conservation districts. South Carolina thus became one of the first states to organize districts covering the entire State.

The governing body of each district is composed of two supervisors appointed by the State Soil Conservation Committee and three supervisors selected by qualified electors residing within the districts. The supervisors receive no compensation for their services, but a state appropriation provides for their travel expenses necessarily incurred in the discharge of their duties.

They are authorized to develop comprehensive plans for the conservation of soil resources and for the control and prevention of soil erosion within the district. These plans shall specify in such detail as may be possible the acts, procedures, performances, and avoidances which are necessary or desirable for the effectuation of such plans, including the specifications of engineering operations, methods of cultivation, the growing of vegetation, cropping programs, tillage practices, and changes in use of land.

The supervisors are authorized to enter into agreements with and furnish

financial or other aid to any owner or occupier of lands within the district in carrying on erosion control or prevention operations within the district.

Individual districts enter into formal agreements with the Soil Conservation Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the facilities of this agency are utilized in carrying out the program of the district. Other federal and state agencies cooperate and assist the districts in their respective fields of action.

This new instrument that the people of the State have set up is one of the most important steps that ~~have~~ ^{has} been taken in the history of South Carolina agriculture. It enables the farmers themselves to guide and direct the program for the preservation and conservation of the State's invaluable soil resources.

Although much of the land of South Carolina has been exposed to erosion, we still have large areas of productive land that needs protection and we must rely on that for the future welfare of the State. Districts provide the mechanism for concentrating on the problem of the best use of all the land in each district.

The South Carolina Bankers Association has actively cooperated with the districts. They have made available teaching materials on soil conservation for use in the schools, and this year are sponsoring with the district supervisors an essay contest on the subject, "Our Land," in the public schools of the State. Many other business groups have taken an active part in promoting soil conservation through newspaper advertisements and other means.

The schools are realizing the importance of teaching more about the State itself, one phase of which is the importance of land in the economy of the State. More and more schools are teaching the need for conserving the soil along with other natural resources.

Under the provision of current legislation, the South Carolina Forestry

Commission is donating 5,000 tree seedlings to individual farmers who are required only to pay shipping costs. This is a great advantage to all farmers and the district supervisors are encouraging cooperating farmers to take advantage of this opportunity extensively.

South Carolina is strategically located to utilize the water power of her streams. Many hydro-electric dams have been erected on the principal rivers of the state. Proper conservation of land resources to prevent erosion not only will be an advantage to the landowners whose land is protected, but also in protecting valuable investments, both public and private, in hydro-electric developments.

Drainage presents quite a problem in the efficient use of land, particularly near the coast. We may anticipate the development for better use of large areas of land in the low-lying sections of the State, sufficient to provide space for many more people.

Within recent years, not only farmers, but other groups as well, have come to realize the importance of protecting the land as the basis of our wealth and prosperity. With the entire State organized in soil conservation districts, every South Carolina farmer has the opportunity and the obligation to seek the assistance of his local soil conservation district in safeguarding and protecting the land, not only for his own use but for the benefit of future generations as well.